

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
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P 301300Z NOV 76

FM AMEMBASSY TANANARIVE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8638

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 TANANARIVE 1927

EXDIS

DEPARTMENT PASS DIA

E.O. 11652: XGDS-4

TAGS: PINS, MA

SUBJECT: LIKELIHOOD OF COUP'S SUCCESS

REF: TANANARIVE 1915

1. SUMMARY: WE FIND IT DIFFICULT TO GAUGE POSSIBLE SUCCESS OF COUP WHICH MAY BE MOUNTED BY COL RABETAFIKA AND HIS ASSOCIATES. THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT THERE IS AN UNDERCURRENT OF DISSATISFACTION WITH THE RATSIRAKA REGIME BUT THE SITUATION, POLITICALLY AND ECONOMICALLY, IS NOT SO BAD THAT THE POPULATION IN GENERAL IS DESPERATELY LOOKING FOR SOME SORT OF CHANGE. YET, RATSIRAKA'S SOURCES OF STRENGTH ARE ONLY SMALL ELEMENTS OF MALAGASY SOCIETY AND, THEREFORE, IF AN ATTEMPT WERE MADE TO NUDGE HIM OUT OF OFFICE, PRO-RATSIRAKA ELEMENTS MIGHT START SCREAMING BUT ARE PROBABLY WITHOUT THE MEANS TOO OPPOSE A WELL-EXECUTED TAKEOVER. END SUMMARY.

2. DESPITE GRAFFITI, CIRCULATION OF POLITICAL TRACTS, AND OTHER MINOR STIRRINGS AGAINST THE REGIME, THERE IS NO PERVASIVE ATMOSPHERE DEMANDING A CHANGE IN GOVERNMENT. RATSIRAKA HAS THUS FAR MANAGED TO MUTE AND NEUTRALIZE OPPOSITION ELEMENTS, AND THE GROWTH OF HIS POLITICAL ORGANIZATION AREMA HAS SERVED TO GIVE IMPRESSION TO THE POPULACE THAT THE RATSIRAKA FORCES ARE NOW WELL-IMPLANTED AND THERE

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IS NO TURNING BACK. THE ECONOMY IS STILL RUNNING DOWNHILL,

BUT NOT AT A PACE THAT WOULD BRING ABOUT A TRULY POPULAR UPRISING. EVEN SOME OF THE MORE CONSERVATIVE ELEMENTS IN TANANARIVE WHO DO NOT LIKE RATSIRAKA, OR HIS OR ANY OTHER FORM OF SOCIALISM, APPEAR TO ECHO MINISTER OF ECONOMY RARIVOSON'S RECENT STATEMENT THAT THE ECONOMY IS NOT THAT BAD.

3. IN RECENT YEARS RATSIRAKA HAS NOT BEEN A CENTRAL FIGURE IN THE MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT, EVEN THOUGH HE WAS A MEMBER OF THE 1972-75 GOVERNMENT OF GENERAL RAMANANTSOA AND PLAYED A STRONG ROLE IN EARLY 1975 AMONG THE MEMBERS OF THE MILITARY DIRECTORATE, LEADING TO HIS ASCENDENCY TO THE PRESIDENCY. AS FAR AS WE CAN TELL, THE OFFICER CORPS OF ALL BRANCHES OF THE MILITARY, AND PROBABLY THE SENIOR NCO'S AS WELL, ARE WESTERN-ORIENTED, NOT HAPPY WITH RATSIRAKA'S PRO-SOVIET SLANT, AND CONSEQUENTLY CANNOT BE CONSIDERED AS TOTALLY LOYAL TO RATSIRAKA AS PRESIDENT. A CAREFULLY MOUNTED COUP, IN WHICH THE SUPPORT OF ALL KEY MILITARY UNITS INCLUDING GENDARMERIE HAS BEEN ASSURED, WOULD PROBABLY MEET WITH LITTLE OPPOSITION UNLESS, AND THIS RESERVATION SHOULD NOT BE MINIMIZED, CONSIDERABLE BLOODSHED DEVELOPS (SEE BELOW). THERE ARE PROBABLY SOME MILITARY WHO, WHEN THE CRUNCH COMES, WILL WAVER OVER WHETHER TO BE DISLOYAL TO THE CURRENT REGIME OR TO GO ALONG WITH THEIR INSTINCTIVE FEELING THAT THE CURRENT REGIME'S POLICIES ARE WRONG FOR MADAGASCAR. ONE OF THESE LATTER ELEMENTS, FOR EXAMPLE, MAY BE NEW ARMED FORCES CHIEF OF STAFF COL RAKOTOHARISON; BUT IN THE END HIS OWN ROLE MAY BE OF NO SIGNIFICANCE IF THE TACTICAL UNITS SUPPORT THE COUP.

4. RATSIRAKA SUPPORTERS, SUCH AS THE AKFM, MONIMA, AND VONJY PARTIES, ARE NOT SO NUMEROUS IN MEMBERSHIP NOR ORGANIZED IN ANY WAY THAT THEY COULD RESIST A MILITARY TAKEOVER. THERE IS ALWAYS THE OUTSIDE POSSIBILITY, HOWEVER, THAT WEAPONS FROM THE USSR, CHINA, OR KOREA HAVE BEEN SECRETLY STOCKED IN THE COUNTRY TO PROVIDE THE WHEREWITHAL FOR OPPOSITION TO A COUP ATTEMPT. NONETHELESS, THESE PARTIES APPEAR TO NOT HAVE THE EXPERIENCE NECESSARY TO CONDUCT OPERATIONS AGAINST THE ENTIRE MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT OR ANY PART THEREOF.

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5. SINCE RATSIRAKA BECAME PRESIDENT, GENDARMERIE HAS BEEN LESS HAPPY WITH CURRENT REGIME THAN REGULAR MILITARY, NOTWITHSTANDING FACT THAT SENIOR GENDARMERIE OFFICERS OCCUPY PLACES IN THE CABINET TO THE SUPREME REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL. GENDARMERIE SUSPECTS THAT RATSIRAKA HIMSELF WAS INVOLVED IN FEB 1975 ASSASSINATION OF CHIEF OF STATE RATSIMANDRAVA, FORMER GENDARMERIE COMMANDER WHO WAS POPULAR AMONG

MOST, IF NOT ALL, MALAGASY. TWO FACTIONS WITHIN GENDARMERIE, MERINA FROM HIGH PLATEAU AND COTIERS, ARE HARMONIOUS. MERINA, LED BY CURRENT COMMANDER LT. COL. RAKOTOMANGA, LOOK UPON RATSIRAKA WITH DISDAIN BECAUSE OF HIS COTIER BACKGROUND. COTIER ELEMENT IS LET BY MAJOR SOJA, WHO IS DISTRUSTED BY RATSIRAKA AND HAD BEEN RATSIRAKA'S ONLY REAL RIVAL FOR PRESIDENCY WHEN MILITARY DIRECTORATE IN SPRING 1975 HAD TO MAKE CHOICE.

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8639

S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 TANANARIVE 1927

EXDIS

6. WHILE WE BELIEVE THAT RAKOTOMANGA WOULD FAVOR OVERTHROWING RATSIRAKA, WE ARE NOT SURE OF HIS BACKBONE. GERMAN EMBASSY SOURCES TELL US THAT RAKOTOMANGA IS DEFINITELY WESTERN-ORIENTED (WIFE IF ALSATIAN), HONEST AND A GOOD LEADER. HE WAS ALSO RATSIMANDRAVA'S PROTEGE, PROBABLY MORE THAN HIS PREDECESSOR AS GENDARMERIE COMMANDER, LT. COL. MAMPILA, WHO IS NOW WEAK MINISTER OF DEFENSE. HOWEVER, RABETAFIKA TOLD DATT THAT RAKOTOMANGA BACKED OFF TWICE WHEN COUP PLOTTERS HAD PROPOSED BEGINNING OF DISTURBANCES, ONCE WHEN RATSIRAKA WAS OUT OF COUNTRY FOR THREE WEEKS IN JUNE 1976, THEN JUST AFTER PRIME MINISTER'S DEATH JULY 30 IN HELICOPTER CRASH. AFTER LATTER TRAGEDY, ACCORDING GERMAN EMBASSY, RAKOTOMANGA TRIED TO RESIGN BECAUSE HE FELT HE WAS ALSO A MARKED MAN, BUT RATSIRAKA REPORTEDLY REFUSED.

7. NATIONAL POLICE ARE WEAK IN LEADERSHIP AND ARMAMENT, AND THEY PRESUMABLY WILL BEND WITH PREVAILING WIND. HOWEVER, THEY MAY ALSO PROVIDE SOURCE OF CONFUSION WHEN MINISTER OF INTERIOR, NOW LOYAL TO RATSIRAKA, SEEKS

POLICE SUPPORT TO PREVENT, FOR EXAMPLE, STORMING OF PALACE.

8. AS FOR PROVINCIAL ADMINISTRATIONS, ALL PROVINCE CHIEFS ARE MILITARY OFFICERS BUT DO NOT HAVE MILITARY UNITS AT THEIR DISPOSAL. THEY ARE ALL APPOINTED BY RATSIRAKA, BUT IT IS KNOWN THAT AT LEAST A COUPLE OF THEM DO NOT HAVE MUCH RESPECT FOR RATSIRAKA, EVEN IF RATSIRAKA HAS BEEN TRYING TO FAVOR COASTAL AREAS. (FOUR OF THE SIX

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PROVINCES ARE ESSENTIALLY COASTAL.) ONE BIG QUESTION MARK FOR COUP PLOTTERS IS CERTAIN TO BE TULEAR PROVINCE, SEAT OF MONIMA PARTY, WHICH HAS BEEN OVER THE YEARS OCCASIONAL SITE FOR ANTI-GOVERNMENT ACTIVITIES SUCH AS ROADBLOCKS, LABOR DISPUTES, AND DISRUPTION OF FOOD DISTRIBUTION. MONIMA HAS ALSO BEEN HOSTILE TO GENDARMERIE, IN PARTICULAR, BECAUSE DURING EARLIER UNCERTAINTIES (1970-72 AND EARLY 1975) GENDARMERIE CAUSED A FEW DEATHS. SINCE TULEAR PROVINCE CHIEF MUST BE ACCEPTABLE TO MONIMA, TULEAR PROVINCE SUPPORT FOR COUP WILL BE IN SOME DOUBT, MORE THAN ANY OTHER PROVINCE.

9. AS MENTIONED PARA 3 ABOVE, FIRST REPORT OF BLOODSHED (IF ANY) IS CERTAIN TO HAVE A NEGATIVE EFFECT ON THE POPULATION AND POSSIBLY ON SOME MILITARY UNITS. MALAGASY IN GENERAL ABHOR VIOLENCE. EACH VIOLENT EVENT IN RECENT HISTORY (THEY ARE FEW AND FAR BETWEEN) HAS BEEN MET WITH CONSTERNATION, UNDERMINING SUPPORT FOR THOSE ELEMENTS APPEARING TO BE RESPONSIBLE. RABETAFIKA, HOWEVER, IS PROBABLY THE BEST PLANNER OF TACTICAL OPERATIONS IN MADAGASCAR AND UNDOUBTEDLY WILL BEAR THIS IMPORTANT FACTOR IN MIND.

10. IN THE ABSENCE OF HIDDEN CACHES OF ARMS, ASSUMING GOOD PLANNING AND SUPPORT OF MOST MILITARY UNITS, AND WITH RABETAFIKA AS COUP "COORDINATOR," COUP ATTEMPT HAS AT LEAST FAIR CHANCE OF BEING SUCCESSFUL.SHEINBAUM

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